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AUTHOR	McGregor, Gail; Halvorsen, Ann; Fisher, Douglas; Pumpian, Ian; Bhaerman, Bob; Salisbury, Christine
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ABSTRACT

This issue brief was developed as part of the Consortium on Inclusive Schooling Practices' framework for standards-based systemic reform. The brief focuses on one of the six major policy areas identified by the Consortium, professional development. It first discusses the concept of teachers as lifelong learners, then explores professional development practices to support inclusive schools, and finally describes the move toward inclusive professional development. Three tables summarize information on: (1) how adults learn; (2) essential policy and procedural questions concerning professional development; and (3) issues to consider in preparation for collaborative teaching relationships. The brief concludes with identifying key professional development issues to address at the local level (such as developing teacher and administrator competencies in responding to the needs of all students) and the state level (such as supporting joint professional development opportunities for special and general education personnel). Contains 23 references. (DB)

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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR *ALL* PERSONNEL IN INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS

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Gail McGregor, Ann Halvorsen, Douglas Fisher,

Ian Pumpian, Bob Bhaerman, and Christine Salisbury

The Consortium on Inclusive Schooling Practices (CISP, 1996) developed a framework to analyze state and local policies and their relationship to the development of inclusive schooling practices. The framework corresponds with the prevailing reform paradigm in most states by focusing on **standards-based systemic reform** across six major policy areas: curriculum, student assessment, accountability, professional development, finance, and governance. This Issue Brief extends the discussion of one of these policy areas, professional development, by initially examining the concept of teachers as lifelong learners, exploring professional development practices to support inclusive schools, and briefly indicating the move toward inclusive professional development.

Teachers as Lifelong Learners

Current discussions about improving the quality of teaching and learning in our country's schools are increasingly focused on professional development as a key strategy to improve schools (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). The three premises grounding the work of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996) illustrate just how critical the skills and repertoire of the classroom teacher are.

- What teachers know and can do is the *most important influence* on what students learn.
- Recruiting, preparing, and retaining good teachers is the *central strategy* for improving our schools.
- School reform cannot succeed unless it focuses on *creating the conditions in which teachers can teach*, and teach well [emphasis added] (pg. 6).

Many classroom teachers are facing new professional challenges as they encounter an increasingly diverse student population (e.g., students whose first language is not English, "at risk" students with a history of educational failure, and students identified with disabilities who require modification of the general education curriculum) (Cole, 1995). Professional development represents a critical vehicle for schools to support teachers in their ongoing acquisition of skills and

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strategies that enable them to teach well in this changing context.

Approaches to Professional Development[1]

Traditional forms of professional development activities are still the norm in many schools and districts across the country. These efforts are best characterized as workshop-based approaches to training about issues that may or may not be of great relevance to school faculty. Separate programs often are offered to general and special educators, reflecting the belief that the knowledge and skills associated with these disciplines are highly distinct (National Association of State Boards of Education, 1992). Findings published by the American Federation of Teachers (1995) reinforce the growing consensus that this approach to professional development is insufficient to equip teachers with the skills necessary to successfully address complex instructional needs of a diverse student population.

Efforts to re-think professional development approaches are gaining support based on the recognition that these activities must not be isolated from other components of a reform agenda. In a national study of the components of restructured schools, Berends and King (1994) noted the following critical roles and responsibilities of teachers in schools undergoing some type of restructuring:

- Staff participate in the design of training based on their local needs;
- Staff participate in collegial planning, curriculum development, and peer observation;
- Teachers function in differentiated roles (including mentoring and peer supervision); and
- Teachers exercise control over curriculum and over school policy (p. 36).

Professional development must reinforce these new forms of teacher involvement and decision making in schools. Sparks (1995) describes shifts in professional development practices (pp. 3-4):

- **From individual development to individual *and* organizational development.** Success for all students depends on the learning of individual school staff *and* improvements in the capacity of schools to renew themselves.

- **From fragmented, piecemeal efforts to professional development driven by a coherent strategic plan for the district and each school.** When viewed as an essential component of a school change agenda, professional development becomes the vehicle through which teachers acquire the understanding and skill to implement practices that will lead to school improvement.

- **From district-focused to school-focused approaches.** While professional development efforts driven by district needs have their place, there is a growing recognition of the unique needs and cultures of individual school buildings. Schools are assuming greater control over professional development activities to ensure that these efforts are aligned with their needs.

- **From a focus on adult needs to a focus on student needs and learning outcomes.** Rather than focusing professional development agendas exclusively on the needs of *educators*, there is a trend to identify needs by beginning with an identification of what *students* need to be able to do. With this as a reference point, it is then possible to identify the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that teachers will need in order for students to realize these outcomes.

- **From "training" away from the job to multiple forms of "job-embedded" learning.** While well-designed programs often incorporate some form of coaching as a follow-up to traditional professional development, more participatory forms of learning are receiving increased attention. Teachers learn by conducting study groups, observing peers, keeping reflective journals, and becoming involved in curriculum development or school imprivement planning.

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♦ **From an orientation of "experts" transmitting knowledge to teachers to the study by teachers of teaching and learning processes.** As professional development moves away from the model in which an "expert" provides direction and advice to teachers which may or may not be relevant to their needs, the concept of the teacher as an active and "lifelong learner" is gaining prominence. Increasingly, schools are creating structures and opportunities for teachers to actively reflect upon their current practices as well as continue their study of teaching and learning as critical components of a professional development program.

♦ **From staff who function primarily as "trainers" to those who provide consultation and facilitation services.** Teachers, administrators, and other staff are assuming new roles (e.g., team leaders and strategic planning team members) for which they need knowledge and skills that are different than those traditionally reflected in their jobs.

♦ **From professional development provided by one or two school departments to programs seen as a responsibility of all teacher leaders and administrators.** In schools in which teachers are actively engaged as lifelong learners, central office administrators, curriculum supervisors, principals, and teachers each, within the context of their own roles and responsibilities, view their own growth and development as well as that of their colleagues, as one of their most important responsibilities.

♦ **From teachers as the primary recipients to continuous improvement in performance for everyone who affects student learning.** Everyone who affects student learning must continually upgrade his or her knowledge and skills — board members, superintendents and central office staff, principals, teachers, support staff (e.g., aides, secretaries, bus drivers, custodians), parents, and community members who serve on policymaking boards and planning committees are also responsible for staying abreast of innovations and issues.

♦ **From professional development viewed as a "frill" that can be cut in difficult financial times to an indispensable process without which schools cannot hope to prepare *all* students for productive lives.**

To be most effective, professional development needs to take a variety of forms, including some that have not been considered previously. As noted in Table 1, there are a variety of ways in which adults learn. There also are a variety of experiences that connect and develop knowledge, including application through professional practices and problem solving. Moreover, not only should there be variety within and among professional development "courses," but professional development should extend beyond formal coursework. Rich development can occur while educators are participating in collaboratives, standards development, curriculum, and assessment work, or in the rigorous advanced certification process of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (United States Department of Education Initiative on Teaching, nd).

Table 2 reflects key policy and procedural questions that many consider central to the conceptualization of a responsive professional development system. These essential questions are consistent with prior research and offer the field important benchmarks for examining current state and district practices.

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Table 1: How Adults Learn

- Adults commit to learning when the goals are realistic and important to them. Therefore, professional development should address areas that educators believe have immediate application in the classroom.

- Adults learn, retain, and use what they perceive is relevant to their professional needs. Therefore, professional development must enable teachers and administrators to see the relationships between what they are learning and their day-to-day activities.

- Adult learning is "ego-involved." Therefore, professional development should provide support from peers and reduce the fear of judgment during learning.

- Adults need to see the results of their efforts and have feedback on how well they are doing. Therefore, professional development should provide opportunities for educators to try out what they are learning and receive structured feedback.

- Adults are more concrete in the way they operate than formerly thought. Therefore, educators should have the opportunity for directed experiences in which they apply what they are learning in the work setting.

- Adults who participate in small groups are more likely to move their learning beyond understanding to application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Therefore, professional development should include learning in small groups in which teachers and administrators share, reflect, and generalize their experiences.

- Adults come to learning with a wide range of experiences, knowledge, interests, and competencies. Therefore, professional development must accommodate this diversity.

- Adults want to be the origin of their own learning and will resist learning situations that they believe are an attack on their competence. Therefore, professional development needs to give educators some control over the what, who, why, when, and where of their learning.

- The transfer of learning is not automatic for adults and must be planned and facilitated. Therefore, coaching and other follow-up supports are needed to help educators transfer learning into daily practice.

Source: Wood & Thompson (1993, pp. 52-57)

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Table 2: Essential Questions

Educators who are involved in professional development need to ask themselves a number of important policy and procedural questions. For example:

- Is professional development **ongoing, intensive, and an integral part** of a teacher's regular work day — *or* is it "tacked on" at the end of the day or sprinkled throughout the year in a few in-service days?
- Is the focus on giving beginning and experienced teachers the **tools needed** to deliver high quality education to all students — *or* is it on seat time in college courses?
- Is it based on **research and best practices?**
- Do we incorporate **multiple forms of learning**, e.g., group study, action research, self-study, or curriculum development, *or* is "training" still the primary form of delivery?
- What opportunities are there to help teachers develop **leadership skills**?
- To what extent is development **connected to student standards** and to the content and pedagogical skills teachers need — *or* is the focus still on generic skills?
- How far have we departed from the **deficit model** (teachers need to be "fixed") to the **growth model** that builds on teachers' knowledge and skills?
- **Who determines and plans the focus** of professional development? To what extent is it designed to address problems identified by the school staff?
- Is it part of a **coherent, long-term plan** — *or* is it a short-term response to an educational "fad"?
- What amount of **time and resources** are devoted to development?
- How are the efforts evaluated? Are we trying to document a **positive correlation between additional professional development and increased effectiveness and improvements in student achievement**?

Source: United States Department of Education Initiative on Teaching (nd. p.12)

Professional Development Practices to Support Inclusive Schools

As described by Stainback and Stainback (1990) an inclusive school "is a place where everyone belongs, is accepted, supports, and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met (1990, p. 3). By definition, distinctions among "general education", "special education" and "at risk" students no longer drive the roles and allocation of resources in inclusive schools. Rather, schools operate as a community (Sergiovanni, 1994), built on core beliefs that

include a respect for and valuing of human diversity. While there is no single set of characteristics that describes all inclusive schools, one defining practice is that students with identified disabilities are not isolated in special classes or areas of the school. Specialized supports required by individual students are provided within general education settings, enabling all students to belong to a group of same-age peers.

What Skills Do Teachers Need to Work in an Inclusive School?

Three practices characteristic of an inclusive approach to schooling are highlighted to exemplify professional development concerns that arise as schools move to more inclusive approaches to instruction. It is important to underscore the need for these practices to be part of a school-wide professional development agenda. As discussed by Pugach and Johnson (1995):

> *A teacher may be having difficulty developing the flexibility to work with students whose needs differ from those of other students. Making those changes within a school context where everyone is addressing the same problems and where a group forum exists for discussing them removes the pressure of being singled out, of being the only one who may be trying to change ....This is not to say that individual change will be neglected but, rather, that this change is more likely to happen when it is part of a building-wide effort and a stated commitment by the principal and the teachers* (p. 16).

Collaboration and Teaming. The inclusion of students in the general education classroom who have traditionally been served in remedial and pull-out service models requires staffing patterns that bring necessary supports to the general classroom setting. A variety of models are emerging in inclusive schools that are based on some form of teacher collaboration and teamwork. This can occur in many ways, ranging from consultation and support teams to more ongoing collaborative relationships that may take the form of co-teaching (Friend & Cook, 1996). In whatever form the sharing of previously separate disciplines and expertise takes, this is clearly a new experience for most teachers. A recent study documenting two teachers' feelings about these new working relationships indicated that the shift to collaborative teaching is associated with initial periods of uncertainty as teachers develop new roles and relationships with a teaching partner (Salend, Johansen, Mumper, Chase, Pike & Dorney, 1997). Issues identified in Table 3 exemplify the ways in which a teacher's most basic assumptions about his/her role become the subject of discussion and, perhaps, the locus of change when there is a shift from the single-teacher approach to more collaborative models of service and support. Failure to attend to these issues and concerns is likely to detract from the ultimate success of the innovation (Walter-Thomas, 1997).

Strategies to Accommodate Diverse Learners. One of the major challenges associated with inclusive classrooms is the need for collaboration at the starting point of the instructional planning process. While general educators have traditionally focused on curriculum development and implementation from a whole group perspective, special educators are trained to focus on instructional adaptations for individual students without a great emphasis on the larger curricular issues (Pugach & Warger, 1995). As described by Winn and Blanton (1997), this requires professional development that builds upon and brings together a mutual understanding of both perspectives.

> *To develop and implement curriculum and instruction based on best practices, along with appropriate instructional adaptations - adaptations that some students will still need - all teachers need grounding in curriculum and instruction for individual differences, as well*

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Table 3: Issues to Consider in Preparation for Collaborative Teaching Relationships

- What are your expectations for students regarding participation? Daily preparation?
- What are your basic classroom rules? What are the consequences?
- Typically, how are students grouped for instruction in your classroom?
- What instructional methods do you like to use (e.g., lectures, class discussions)?
- What practice activities do you like to use (e.g., cooperative learning groups, labs)?
- How do you monitor and evaluate student progress?
- Describe your typical tests and quizzes.
- Describe other typical projects and assignments.
- How is instruction differentiated for students with special needs?
- What type of special assistance is available to students with disabilities during class? On written assignments? On quizzes and tests?
- How and when do you communicate with families?
- What are your strengths as a teacher? Your weaknesses? Your pet peeves?
- What do you see are our potential roles and responsibilities as collaborators?
- If we collaborate, what are your biggest hopes for our work as a team? What are your biggest concerns?

Source: Walter-Thomas, Bryant & Land (1996, p. 261)

> *as an understanding of the interconnectedness between the two. With this understanding, teachers will be able to develop supports for students who need them, rooted in, and clearly related to - rather than fragmented from - the classroom curriculum* (pp. 5-6).

Considerable attention has been devoted to promoting practices within the field of general education that provide options to accommodate diverse learners. Constructivist models, the use of integrated, thematic approaches to instruction, cooperative learning, the use of peer tutors, and curriculum based on multiple intelligence theory represent just a few of the general education approaches that are compatible with heterogeneous classrooms. There is evidence to support the value of many of these approaches (McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998). The important issue from a professional development perspective is that schools adopt approaches that are compatible with the values, context, and beliefs of its faculty. Reflection and careful consideration of these issues is incompatible with traditional inservice approaches that rely on episodic, didactic approaches to information sharing.

Problem-solving. As described by Giangreco and colleagues (Giangreco, Cloninger, Dennis & Edelman, 1995), inclusive educational practices "require people to work together to invent opportunities and solutions that maximize the learning experiences of all children" (p. 321). While there are many structured approaches to guide the problem-solving process, the critical characteristic of this "skill" is that it relies upon the expertise, creativity, and contextual knowledge of teachers within a school setting. Taught as a strategy to all students and teachers in an elementary school in Johnson City, New York, school staff noted that "whether applied to classroom routines, teaming practices, or school policies, collaborative problem solving offers opportunities to change classroom and school culture in ways that benefit all learners" (Salisbury, Evans & Palombaro, 1997, p. 208).

How Can Professional Development Support the Adoption of Inclusive Schooling Practices?

In schools across the country, the decision to adopt inclusive approaches to service delivery is motivated by different reasons. For some schools, this shift is undertaken because it fits the philosophy and reform agenda of the school or district. For other schools, the threat of legal action based on the clear obligation of schools to serve students in the least restrictive environment places them in a situation where change is required but not necessarily desired. Whatever the individual circumstance, initial professional development efforts must provide essential information about upcoming changes in service delivery practices.

This is clearly just the first step, and the focus of professional support must quickly transition from awareness and informational activities to strategic planning, skill building, and program implementation. Reflecting emerging standards of best practice described earlier, professional development activities to support inclusive schooling practices should reflect the following principles:

1. Professional development needs are locally identified by participants;

2. Professional development is locally-designed, delivered, and is focused at the school level; however, the district has a central role in facilitating the efforts and in communicating the activities in one school to other schools in the district;

3. Collaborative interdisciplinary teams which include parents and paraprofessionals as well as professionals, are involved in staff development activities;

4. Ongoing support for implementation of new practices is available through multiple modalities, including peer coaching, on-site mentoring, linkage with schools experienced in this innovation, and networking with subject and grade level colleagues.

5. These experiences, in turn, inform the planning process, guiding the design of future activities.

The experiences of one California school, described in the following vignette, illustrate these principles.

A Vignette

The School Context

Louis — a second grade student in a California school. Louis — who has Down syndrome — attends a large, urban school in a diverse, multi-grade (1st to 3rd) team-taught classroom of 40 students. Several students in the class receive speech and language services and two receive support from a resource specialist. Five students with limited English proficiency receive support services from a bilingual educator, and two students are identified as gifted and talented.

The service-delivery model. A part-time instructional assistant, a teacher who serves as an inclusion facilitator, and two general educators are available to support instruction. The inclusion support teacher, with a caseload of eight students, and the resource specialist, with a caseload of 28 students, collaborate in order to support all of the students with IEPs in several general education classrooms. To accomplish this, the special educators observed classes where both programs were involved and selected ones in which the inclusion support teacher would support students designated for "resource" assistance and others where the resource specialist would support a student with more significant disabilities. This approach decreased the number of adults coming in and out of the classroom (the "revolving door") and increased special educator's staff time in a given classroom. As a result, co-teaching for parts of the day has become possible. The special education teachers meet weekly to discuss specific students. A larger support team, including the classroom teacher, related services, parents, and paraprofessionals meets monthly.

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Professional Development Approaches

To ensure the effectiveness of their newly inclusive, collaborative, and multi-age classes, the staff planned several development and support activities for the school community. They received school board approval to "bank" time and generate common planning periods. They also arranged for the on-site, after-school program to begin earlier on shortened school days. Staff conducted individual needs assessments and reached consensus on uses of banked time. They then designed a professional development series to be delivered by school and local university faculty on developmentally appropriate practices across the elementary grades, cooperative teaching and learning, proactive team planning/problem- solving strategies, and curricular adaptations. Workshops were conducted along with several corollary activities such as (1) visiting sites that are more experienced in cross-categorical support for multi-age grouping; (2) selecting teacher leaders who receive release time to coach their colleagues, and (3) scheduling periodic roundtables for reflecting, sharing, and planning.

Moving Toward Inclusive Professional Development

Professional development programs at the building level are shaped by district-level goals, policies, and practices. These agendas reflect, to varying degrees, the orientation and priorities identified by the state education agency. Several key issues that emerge at these levels are identified below. Each serves as an example or benchmark to evaluate the extent to which current professional development practices are supportive of an inclusive schooling agenda.

Key Professional Development Issues to Address at the Local Level

School district personnel involved in implementing effective professional development programs should consider related issues, such as whether or not they:

- provide opportunities and utilize funds to develop teacher and administrator competencies in responding to the needs of *all* students;
- provide opportunities for *all* personnel to share expertise about meeting the needs of students with disabilities;
- address the needs of a diverse student population;
- provide professional development time for a mixture of activities such as new knowledge dissemination, dialogues of goals and missions, and curriculum planning; and
- include parents in professional development activities and open the activities to other stakeholders to work with students with the full range of abilities and disabilities (Consortium on Inclusive Schooling Practices, 1996)

Key Professional Development Issues to Address at the State Level

As state standards and assessments for students are approved, states are establishing state-wide networks to assist in professional development. State policymakers and state education agency staff concerned with professional development should consider several issues, such as whether or not:

- the state supports a system of professional development that addresses the learning needs of students with the full range of abilities;
- the state encourages joint professional development opportunities for special and general education personnel;
- continuing education requirements promote the development of teaching competencies for a broad array of adult learners; and
- special education teachers are regularly

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involved in general education and state-wide preparation programs and network in such areas as performance-based assessment, mathematics and science education, and writing across the curriculum (Consortium on Inclusive Schooling Practices, 1996).

Conclusions

As schools move toward including more students with disabilities in general education classrooms, they need to consider *every* aspect of effective schooling. Teachers need planning time, on-going support, and continuing professional development. As many observers have noted, inclusion is a "work in progress." However, we are convinced that comprehensive professional development will help guide and support further efforts to improve teaching and learning for ***all*** students.

Just as we strive to be inclusive in our instructional practices, so too must our professional development efforts include both a broader array of participants and a greater range of staff development strategies. Effective professional development efforts will need to include ***all*** personnel (general and special education teachers, administrators, parents, and support staff) and will require that traditional paradigms of training give way to more participatory methods of inquiry and staff development. Well-designed professional development systems will need to be supported with resources, time, and personnel to ensure that the needs of students and staff are appropriately addressed. To be inclusive in both practice and attitude, professional development will need to occur within the larger context of school improvement efforts in ways that ensure the meaningful involvement of all those who support the education of children in their local schools.

Endnotes

[1] The term "professional development" is used throughout this, and other, Issue Briefs in order to be consistent with the original six policy areas discussed in the foundational Issue Brief, *A Framework for Evaluating State and Local Policies for Inclusion* (December, 1996.) The intent is not to limit the concept of professional development to those working in the classroom but rather to include all school personnel and stakeholders in the educational process, including parents.

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AUTHORS

Gail McGregor, Rural Institute on Disabilities, University of Montana

Ann Halvorsen, Department of Educational Psychology, California State University at Hayward

Douglas Fisher, Interwork Institute, San Diego State University

Ian Pumpian, Interwork Institute, San Diego State University

Bob Bhaerman, National Association of State Boards of Education

Christine Salisbury, Child and Family Studies Program, Allegheny University of the Health Sciences

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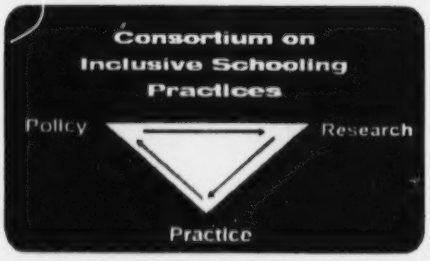

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